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ABSTRACT

The changing characteristics of students attending community colleges and the decline in financial support for community colleges have redefined the role of counseling in the community college. In the 1950s and 1960s, counselors served an "in loco parentis" role, providing personal counseling, vocational guidance, and social support for the traditional community college student population. In the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic minorities, older women, part-time students, and displaced workers began enrolling in community colleges. To meet the needs of these new students, community colleges are reinstating testing and placement, dismissal and probation policies, general education requirements, and select admissions programs. The emerging role of counseling involves helping students to complete their academic objectives; the reduction of student attrition is a priority. Counselors must perform the roles of student developers and learning agents. As student developers, counselors must communicate to students the importance of skill building and other academic requirements and help them understand the value of their academic endeavors. As learning agents, counselors must assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success. Crucial characteristics that community college counselors need to be successful include a strong sense of professional mission, rapport, and empathy. Community college counselors must serve as student advocates and promote strategies for increasing minority student retention. The increase in nontraditional students coupled with a decrease in resources forces counselors to take more cost effective approaches to their counseling. (NB)

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THE EMERGING ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE COUNSELING

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As Richardson and Bender (1987) state, "The characteristics of students attending community colleges reflect the demographic changes of the 1980s." These "new" community college students are described by Cohen and Brawer (1982) as, "those who attend part-time; those who may not be able to afford educational costs; those whose cultural or ethnic background have restrained them in the past from acquiring a college education; and, those who have had poor preparatory education for college." Many of these students also have employment and family obligations so they can devote only limited amounts of time to academic activities. Yet, these students demonstrate a tremendous motivation to become "educated" and to improve their lives. Furthermore, the current decline in financial support for community colleges caused by cutbacks in federal, state, and local funding is severely affecting community colleges. These financial problems are accentuated by the growing number of "new" students arriving on campus. In reaction many colleges have expanded such functions as career development, counseling, academic advising, community services, financial aid, and health services, thus increasing operating costs. Consequently, the future role of counseling has not only to address the challenge of reviewing traditional counseling activities and the needs of a "new" community college population, but also the management current personnel and fiscal resources.

In counseling psychology during the 1950s and early 1960s, Carl Rogers and his contemporaries dominated ideas in the counseling field. Guided by their client-centered philosophies, counselors assisted in the process of "humanizing" education in community colleges. The "humanizing" of education

was often accompanied by eliminating testing, placement, academic progress, and it also represented liberalized courses and curriculum selection. During the 1950s and 1960s counselors served an "in loco parentis" role since they primarily provided personal counseling, vocational guidance, and social support for students who were generally considered to be "immature adolescents" (Leach, 1984). These approaches were utilized because the majority of students were traditional: full-time students between the ages of 18 and 24 seeking a baccalaureate degree and academically prepared for college-level work.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, a significant change in the student profile occurred. Large numbers of students who were simply not prepared for college work began enrolling in community colleges, many from ethnic groups underrepresented in higher education. There was also an increase in the number of older women, part-time students, and displaced workers, many of whom never expected to return to college. These changes along with the quality reformation have now caused a shift in the practices of the 1960s. Community colleges are reinstating testing and placement, dismissal and probation policies, general education requirements, and select admissions programs which suggests that successful students are required to have high personal expectations, be very direction oriented, and be able to receive and process information (O'Banion, 1984). The emerging role of counseling is thus intimately associated with helping students to complete their academic objectives. The newest and foremost priority of counselors is to reduce student attrition, while simultaneously complementing this approach with a very keen sensitivity for the individual student needs, values, and educational objectives.

In order to support individual student needs in the new community college environment, and yet respond to future challenges, counselors need to effectively accept and perform two roles. These two roles are as student developers and learning agents (Noel, Lee, and Levitz, 1984, 23). The student developer role requires that counselors assume the responsibility of communicating to students the importance of skill building and other academic requirements in vivid, realistic terms and helping them to understand that their current academic endeavors have present and future value.

The second role as learning agent requires that counselors assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success. The first step is working with students in defining and communicating instructional standards, the institutional mission, and campus "learning culture." To be effective, counselors as learning agents are directly involved with students when they first start college. Counselors are "central" in primary intake services, such as registration, advising, orientation, testing, placement, and career planning (Noel, Lee, and Levitz, 1984, 23). By reviewing, coordinating, and working to assure that these intake services are effective, counselors aid students in planning educational programs and objectives based upon their abilities and interests. Counselors are able to warn students early enough to guarantee that if they are experiencing problems in their academic work, they can receive adequate support. Furthermore, counselors are able to provide students with up-to-date information about their progress toward finishing their academic program.

There are also crucial characteristics that effective community college counselors need in order to be successful student developers and learning agents (Keller, 1983). One of the most important is a strong sense of professional mission: a drive to help others and the belief that students can

achieve all that they are capable of becoming. Now more than ever, rapport, the ability to develop favorable relationships with staff and students, is mandatory for the new counseling role. Counselors need to have empathy, the ability to understand what students are experiencing, as well as a "special" perception of students: the ability to think in terms of the individual student and how one's strengths and needs can be accommodated and tied into the challenges of the institution. Overall, counselors receive a tremendous sense of satisfaction from experiencing students' growths and successes (Clifton, 1984).

Community college counselors have to continue in their role as student advocate if the future community college is to continue as an environment in which students can and will develop. One of the future dangers generated by continuing changes motivated by the quality reformation and other changing educational policies may be the denial of access and opportunities through the enacting of stricter testing and placement and other potential access barriers. Counselors must be ever vigilant concerning these practices. They have to continue to act as special student oriented advocates to help community colleges adapt their practices to the needs of, and not to serve as barriers to, the disadvantaged and nontraditional students.

There has to be special emphasis by counselors directed toward Black and Hispanic students enrolled in community colleges. The reason is high attrition rates of minority students, especially those from urban areas. Counselors should promote and encourage strategies for the purpose of increasing the retention of minority students. Some of the strategies that should be considered are:

1. establishing a minority mentoring program sponsored by faculty and staff;

2. promoting and coordinating orientation and success achievement courses emphasizing minority student participation;
3. implementing special initiatives to target the involvement of faculty as "human links" between the college and minority students;
4. selecting a group of minority students to assist freshman minority students in becoming acclimated to the college environment; and,
5. encouraging the establishment of staff development programs to help faculty identify the learning needs of students who may have different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures than those traditionally reflected in the community college environment.

Another issue which the future role of counseling has to address is the demand for the careful management of current personnel and fiscal resources. Careful management of resources means that there must be more cost effective approaches for counseling. Some of the methods that should be considered are:

1. expanding counseling services by establishing linkages with other service professionals within the college and community;
2. setting up cost effective personnel resources such as volunteer corps, peer counselors, and paraprofessionals;
3. examining the establishment of fees for some services;
4. reviewing counseling services each year to examine effectiveness and readjusting those services as needed; and,
5. becoming familiar with new resource management approaches through professional organizations, workshops, and seminars.

The 1980s have brought new challenges for the community college counselor. Most evident of these challenges are an increase in nontraditional

students and fewer resources with which to serve these "new" students. In order to meet these challenges there is a need for effective, innovative planning and change. The emerging role of counseling should feature counselors as learning agents and student developers working in a team effort with the entire college and community to help their students to be even more successful in the future. Peter Drucker, a noted management consultant observes, "The foundation of innovative strategy is planned and systematic sloughing off of the old, the dying, and the obsolete. Innovative organizations spend neither time nor resources defending yesterday. Systematic abandonment of yesterday alone can free resources, especially the scarcest resource of them all: capable people for work on the new."

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